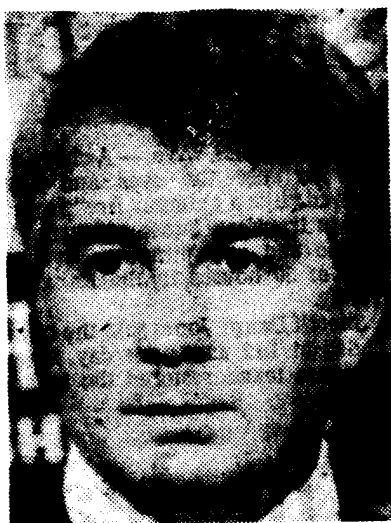


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Larry Speakes
Defends policy toward South Africa

Tutu stand criticized by U.S.

By Owen Ullmann
Inquirer Washington Bureau

SANTA BARBARA, Calif. — The Reagan administration, refusing to loosen its ties to South Africa's white-minority government, yesterday criticized Bishop Desmond Tutu for boycotting a meeting between South African President Pieter W. Botha and an interracial group of religious leaders to discuss the future of that country.

"A refusal by any party to meet and negotiate only worsens the prospect for understanding in South Africa," presidential spokesman Larry Speakes said in referring to Bishop Tutu, the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize winner and black leader.

Nine church leaders met with Botha for two hours yesterday in Pretoria, then declared that he had virtually no understanding of the suffering and frustrations of his country's black majority.

Bishop Tutu had warned Sunday that South Africa was headed toward a "catastrophe" and "blood bath" because of the government's apartheid policy.

Bishop Tutu also had asserted that the Reagan administration's policy toward South Africa was "as evil, as immoral, as un-Christian as the policy that they are seeking to buttress — apartheid."

However, White House officials said yesterday that the administration remained firmly committed to its policy of support for the South African government as a strategic ally and that it remained opposed to congressional legislation that would impose economic sanctions against the country.

One senior White House official said top administration officials — including Secretary of State George P. Shultz, CIA Director William J. Casey and national security adviser Robert C. McFarlane — have endorsed a memorandum by White House communications director Patrick J. Buchanan that urges the President to veto sanctions legislation and demonstrate that the United States "stands by its allies."

The official said that the memo represented a "consensus" within the administration and that President Reagan was believed to share that view.

Reagan, vacationing at his ranch in the Santa Ynez Mountains, has vowed to keep close political and economic ties with South Africa in order to maintain the ability to pressure the white-minority government to move away from its system of apartheid.

But Reagan's policy of "constructive engagement" has come under increasing attack in Congress, particularly since the Pretoria government imposed a state of emergency to deal with spreading violence in black townships.

Apparently in response to Bishop Tutu's criticism of administration policies, Speakes issued a statement that noted that at a meeting with the bishop in December, the President had given "a strong indication of the high regard the United States has for the bishop and his views."

Speakes stressed the U.S. position that negotiations were the best way to bring a peaceful end to apartheid.

"The job of ending apartheid lies essentially in the hands of South Africans. It is urgent that all South Africans sit down, begin to reason together and work out a better future," Speakes said.